



**SPARKLING INK** *Blog*

**BLOGGING LIFE**

*Aspects of Lifestyle Blogging*

**Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu**  
*TAMK University of Applied Sciences*  
**Viestinnän koulutusohjelman opinnäytetyö**  
*Thesis of Media Programme*  
**Mediatuotannon suuntautumisvaihtoehto**  
*Specialization of Media Production*

Marraskuu 2009 / November 2009

***Tiina Rinkinen***

## THESIS SUMMARY

**Tiina Rinkinen**

***Sparkling Ink blog / Blogging Life – Aspects of Lifestyle Blogging***

November 2009

55 pages

TAMK University of Applied Sciences

Media Programme

Area of Specialization: Media Production

Thesis type: Project

Thesis supervisor: Sohvi Sirkesalo

Key words: *blogs, lifestyle journalism, blogosphere*

### **Abstract**

This thesis takes a closer look into my blog Sparkling Ink, the world of lifestyle blogs and the community that has grown around them. I will solely concentrate on blogs with home and lifestyle related themes. In this thesis, I review the journey of publishing my own lifestyle blog, and becoming a member of the community of bloggers. I examine the requirements and practicalities that are needed in order to publish a blog, in addition to the typical features of lifestyle blogs. I will also discuss discovering my own signature niche and finding a place in the blogosphere, through which new connections have been established, personally and professionally.

The networks, contacts and relationships created in the lifestyle blogosphere have transferred from the web environment to the real world building new projects and opportunities in the field of lifestyle content production and creative industries. The lifestyle blog community has created a way to network, use social media platforms, do business and establish a lifestyle, becoming an important part of an active community and media that promotes creativity, self expression and a modern way to grow power in the community.

I base this thesis on a close examination and participation in the lifestyle blogging community, and my own experiences during the publishing my own blog. In addition to other sources, analyzing blogging during the course *Blogging my way*, instructed by Holly Becker, has also given me the means to reflect on my knowledge and experiences in this thesis.

During the writing of thesis and the production of Sparkling Ink blog, I have built a solid knowledge base of blog content production, lifestyle blogosphere and the networks of the professionals working in it. I have discovered solutions to numerous challenges, while a group of new questions has arisen that have motivated me further to develop a blog brand and starting to build a career in the area of my passion.

# OPINNÄYTETYÖN TIIVISTELMÄ

**Tiina Rinkinen**

*Sparkling Ink blog / Blogging Life – Aspects of Lifestyle Blogging*

Marraskuu 2009

55 sivua

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu

Viestinnän koulutusohjelma

Mediatuotannon suuntautumisvaihtoehto

Opinnäytetyön muoto: Projektimuotoinen

Opinnäytetyön ohjaaja: Sohvi Sirkesalo

Avainsanat: *blogs, lifestyle journalism, blogosphere*

## Tiivistelmä

Tämä opinnäytetyö tarjoaa katsauksen blogiini Sparkling Ink sekä lifestyle-blogien ympärille rakentuneeseen yhteisöön. Tutkiessani aihetta keskityin yksinomaan koti- ja lifestyleaiheisiin blogeihin. Opinnäytetyössäni kuvailen matkaa blogin julkaisemisessa, ja sen toteuttamista ensimmäisen vuoden aikana. Kerron kokemuksistani blogiyhteisön jäsenenä toimimisesta sekä sen vaikutuksista. Kartoitan lifestyle-blogien tyyppillisiä piirteitä sekä vaatimuksia ja käytännön toimia, jotka liittyvät blogien julkaisuun.

Kerron tarkemmin myös oman niche-ajatuksen ja tyylin määrittelemisestä blogin kirjoittajan näkökulmasta sekä oman paikan löytämisestä blogiyhteisössä, joka tarjoaa tehokkaan verkostoitumiskanavan niin henkilökohtaisella että ammatillisella tasolla. Blogiyhteisössä luodut kontaktit ovat siirtyneet yhä enemmän virtuaalimaailmasta jokapäiväiseen elämään mahdollistaen uusia yhteistyömahdollisuuksia ja projekteja luovien alojen alueella. Lifestyle-blogien verkosto on luonut oman tapansa hyödyntää verkkoympäristön ja sosiaalisen median tarjoamia mahdollisuuksia edistäen luovaa elämäntapaa, sekä samalla kasvattaen modernin yhteisöllisyyden toimintamahdollisuuksia ja voimaa.

Tässä opinnäytetyössä käsittelemäni aihepiirit ja pohdinta perustuvat omiin kokemuksiini blogin sisällöntuotannosta ja blogiyhteisössä toimimisesta. Muiden käyttämieni lähteiden ohella, Holly Beckerin ohjaaman *Blogging Your Way* –kurssin aiheet ja kurssin aikana tekemäni analyysi bloggaamisesta, ovat antaneet monia ajatuksia opinnäytetyön aiheiden käsittelyyn.

Tämän opinnäytetyöprosessin ja Sparkling Ink –blogin julkaisemisen aikana oppimani taidot ovat rakentaneet minulle vahvan tietopohjan blogien sisällöntuotannosta, lifestyleblogien rakentamasta yhteisöstä sekä sen sisällä toimivien ammattilaisten kanssa työskentelystä. Olen oivaltanut uusia ratkaisuja useisiin haasteisiin sekä samalla kohdannut lisää kysymyksiä, joiden motivoimana lähdän kehittämään blogini brändiä sekä rakentamaan ammattiosaamistani alalla.

# Contents

<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2 Key words .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Blogs .....	7
2.2 Lifestyle journalism .....	7
2.3 Blogosphere.....	8
<b>3 Beginning of Sparkling Ink .....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Project schedule .....	10
<b>4 Blog publishing .....</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1 Blog host.....	12
4.2 Blog name.....	13
4.3 Characteristics and structure .....	14
4.4 Blog design .....	15
4.5 Commenting area.....	16
4.6 Blogroll.....	17
4.7 Author information .....	18
<b>5 Blog authoring.....</b>	<b>20</b>
5.1 Author identity .....	20
5.2 Audience.....	20
5.3 Niche.....	22
5.3.1 The niche of Sparkling Ink .....	23
<b>6 Blog posts.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>7 Copyright for bloggers .....</b>	<b>31</b>
7.1 Copyright .....	31
7.2 Fair use .....	31
7.3 Creative Commons .....	32
7.4 Disclaimer .....	34
<b>8 Networking and building a readership.....</b>	<b>36</b>

8.1 Visitor counter.....	37
8.2 Social networking.....	38
8.2.1 Twitter.....	39
8.2.2 Flickr.....	41
8.2.3 Facebook.....	42
8.2.4 Other places to be.....	43
<b>9 Blog ads.....</b>	<b>44</b>
9.1 Blog advertising networks.....	48
9.2 Advertising transparency.....	49
<b>10 Conclusions.....</b>	<b>51</b>
10.1 Future of blogs.....	51
10.2 Development of Sparkling Ink.....	52
<b>11 References.....</b>	<b>53</b>
11.1 Text references.....	53
11.2 Image references.....	54

# 1 Introduction

Jennifer is an environmentally aware print designer, Ez collects inspiration, Holly is an interior designer and social media guru, Laura writes about sweet things in life, and Deb cooks and photographs food passionately. These women live far away from each other, have different backgrounds and professions. Yet something connects them. These women are all passionate about the same thing, living a creative life, and blogging all about it.

Without blogs Jennifer, Ez, Holly, Laura and Deb would probably have never heard of each other. Neither would have many other like-minded people. In fact, I would have never known about these people myself. Like a large number of lifestyle enthusiasts, we have connected through blogging. The passion of all the lifestyle bloggers definitely isn't always the same; some love food, some design, some arts and crafts. But still these bloggers share something: the motivation to write, photograph and share their view of life. And so do I. A little more than year ago, I decided to create my own corner in the blogosphere.

Blogging is beginning to be noticed by traditional media as well. Blogging as a profession or at least financially profitable work is a growing phenomenon, and as a result, being taken more seriously over the past few years. Companies have realized the opportunities that are connected with an active presence in online environment, and the ways blogs can strengthen their brand and place in the market. After the financial effects of blogs have grown, more work and resources have come into use. The dynamics are in a process of changing from users approaching the virtual environment and effecting it to the virtual environment and the activities there having a real life impact on the users. On Financial Times, Caroline Taylor discusses the impacts that blogs have also outside of the virtual environment. "The phenomenon of one-way posts developing into two-way virtual communications and then real-world enterprise is common" (Taylor 2009).

Especially companies and content providers with specific target audiences have gained a noticeable place in the web environment. As a result, they have found their audience better, and have been able to connect with people with similar interests. Blogs and other online content offer small producers a more direct and effective way to increase their customer base, while creating more alternatives and specific content for the audience.

## **2 Key words**

### **2.1 Blogs**

*A weblog*, or more commonly called *a blog*, can take many forms. In 2002, Todd Stauffer defines a blog as the following: “A blog is a website that’s designed to be updated with items in a linear, time-based fashion, similar to a personal journal or diary, except that the contents are meant specifically for public consumption” (Stauffer 2002, 4). Now seven years later, blogs still have the personal characteristic that Stauffer was talking about. However, in addition to acting simply as a place to record personal happenings, blogs have grown to be significant professional content producers on many topic areas, one being lifestyle.

Compared to traditional media, blogs offer more detailed, narrowly focused and often surprising content. A blog visitor is reading the blog based on their own motivation and a will to create a deeper relationship with the writer, the ideal and the lifestyle which the blog represents. Blogs are powerful in creating community based media that allow multi-voiced conversations. Ideally, blogs can be a tool to build, strengthen and concentrate modern community actions.

### **2.2 Lifestyle journalism**

The focus on home has been a growing trend in the field of *lifestyle journalism*. Western lifestyle has moved from city centers and public places more and more back to homes. Home is valued as a personal space reflecting the individual style that people want to share with their family and friends. Home is a place of comfort and personal time, but also



for entertaining and spending time with other people. The interest in investing in home and well being at home has increased, creating a large demand for home related services and media content.

The web environment, including blogs has gained an important and still growing role in home content production. This on-going trend is a fertile landscape for blogs to grow and gain a large base of readers, through which they have become meaningful and some profitable lifestyle content providers. Blogging has also offered a way to create content from within homes, and as a result, created a new group of content producers. Blogs are succeeding in the competition of gathering solid readerships in the growing lifestyle online content market where they can act as a reliable source for the audience seeking home related content online.

### **2.3 Blogosphere**

The term *blogosphere* is often used to describe the community which blogs have created, and the interactions inside of it. "The blogosphere is the term that has come to be used to describe the entire phenomenon of blogging - all the blogs, all the links between the blogs, and all the topics being written about in blogs" (Yang 2006, 3). The blogosphere of lifestyle blogs has grown strong, and has over the years created a community with many effects in the virtual but also the real world. Technorati has been examining the community that blogs have created, and it releases a yearly report based on its finding while also acting as a blog network listing, connecting blogs. According to Technorati (2009), the amount of blogs has doubled every 5-7 months during the last five years. By 2008 there were over 70 million blogs tracked by Technorati, and over 120 000 blogs being created every day.

Who are these millions and millions of bloggers, and why do they blog? According to the yearly "State of Blogosphere 2009" report by Technorati, the largest group of bloggers is

between 25-45 years old; around 67 % of them male and 33 % female. Although currently almost half of the bloggers are living in America, the nature of the blogosphere is changing from being one continent based to multiple locations all over the world. According to the report by Technorati, there are three major motives behind blogging; almost all bloggers want to speak their minds, most bloggers want to share their expertise and experiences, and some bloggers have a goal to make money or do business through blogging (Technorati 2009).

The statistics of the report show that millions of bloggers use a fair amount of time to create blog content. If blogging has become such an important part of so many people's lives, it must have some real life impacts as well. 63% of surveyed bloggers say that blogging has led them to become more involved with things they are passionate about. The research also reports that blogging has had predominantly positive impacts on their personal lives; 42% of the surveyed bloggers say that they have become friends with someone they have met through their blog. In addition to the personal life impacts, bloggers have also noticed positive professional affects. In the research, 58% say that their professional presence in the industry has grown as a result of blogging. Blogging has also given opportunities to get financial advantage from the work contributed to blogging (Technorati 2009).

### **3 Beginning of Sparkling Ink**

To create my own blog concept and act as my own editor, I started building a lifestyle blog myself. The blog was designed to be my personal project to test the web publishing environment, and the editorial work involved with it. I also wanted to strengthen my professional development as a freelance writer and food editor. From the beginning, my goal was to start a gradual process of building a professional Scandinavian style food and home blog with a seasonal focus written in English.

I have been passionate about lifestyle topics, and had had a desire to enter the field of lifestyle journalism. Currently, there is no other type of publishing channel that can compete with blogs that are often free, technically easy to use and through which large audiences are possible to be reached. I wanted to be able to create content at a fast pace, and publish it at low cost. A blog platform also offers great features for publishing both visual and written content. The combination of these two aspects was enthralling to me from the beginning of the blog production.

#### ***3.1 Project schedule***

In fall 2007, I started to research blogs that acted as or close to professional web content producers. To reflect on my own blog idea, I benchmarked a large group of existing blogs with similar target audiences as my potential readers. During the benchmarking, I mapped out blogs with similar content focus, visual style and author perspective. I started to read around 30 blogs regularly, paying close attention to the structure and layout of the blogs, and to the interaction between the writer and the readers. In addition to my regular reads, I kept going through a large selection of blogs aimed mostly at women interested in home and style content. After reading blogs actively myself, I started listing things I

would want to build my own blog around, and practicalities that would be needed to start publishing a blog.

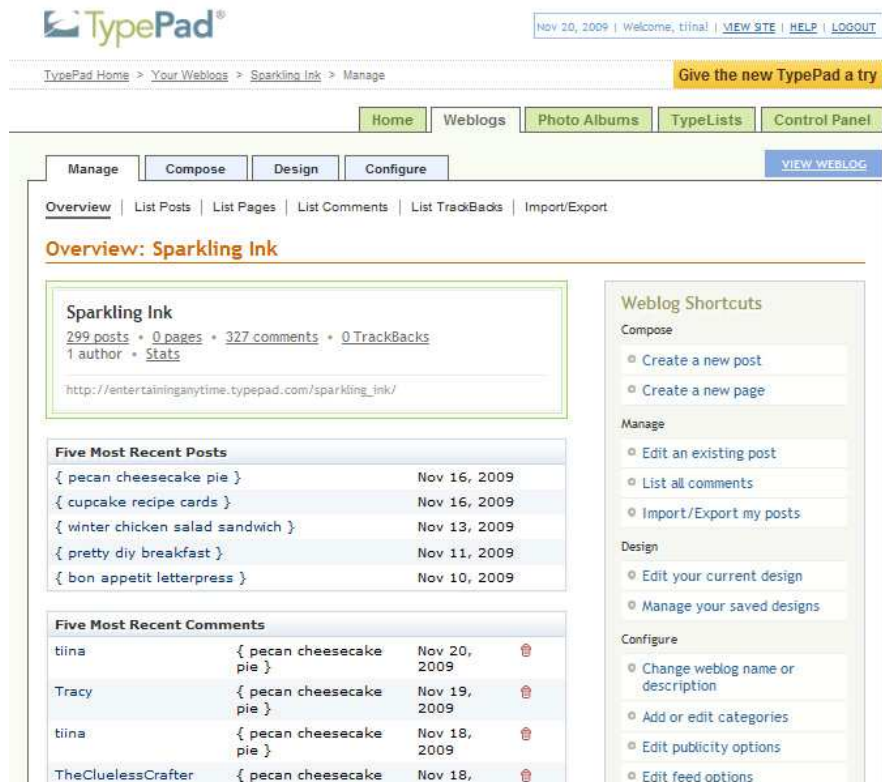
The schedule of the blog production has been gradual from the beginning. The first goal was to make the basic functions of the blog work, and publish it right after that. The content development started after handling these technical aspects. In fall 2008, I began publishing the blog. Now a year later, the blog has started to represent the chosen and later refocused topics more closely. The upcoming year will be used to keep developing the content selection and networking to expand the readership of Sparkling Ink. It will also be a time for commercial development with the intention of adding advertising space on the blog. Building more content to support the focus of the blog, and engaging a larger number of readers, will be an ongoing task.

## 4 Blog publishing

### 4.1 Blog host

Most blogs are hosted by large blog engines. Choosing the host for the blog is essential, so it is central to look closely into the features of them before opening an account. Some hosting services are free and offer a wide variety of features for rather advanced blogging. Blog engines that charge a fee either yearly or biannually, offer more options to customize and manage the blog. A good way to compare the blog hosts is to review blogs that are powered by the engines. It is also important that the company provides customer service and help in any possible cases of issues.

According to my observations online, currently the most popular choices for blog platforms are *Blogger*, *WordPress*, *Squarespace* and *Typepad*. After comparing the features and the operations of these services, I chose to open my blog account with Typepad by *Six Apart*. Typepad has many levels of blogging accounts. From their selection, the Pro account with a moderate annual fee fit my needs the best.



**Image 4.1** The dashboard of Sparkling Ink blog hosted by Typepad.

## 4.2 Blog name

The name of the blog often symbolically describes the topic of the blog, but at the same time sets the style and the tone for it. Blogs are listed in numerous places only by the name, so it is vital for attracting readers to have a name that stands out in the crowd. It is surprising how many names that feel unique are already in use in the blogosphere; therefore, the first step to make sure that the name is not used by someone else already. Companies or other providers named the same or similar to the name of your blog can be misleading the potential audience from finding the blog especially from search engines.

Deciding the name for my blog was first of all related to the chosen language. The language choice was made in the very beginning based on the desire to reach people outside of Finland, and trusting the fact that Finnish speaking audience with interest in the

blog topic would read the blog in English. I decided to use a brainstorming method to create the name for my blog. I brainstormed names through writing down words that I found attractive and the style that I was envisioning for the blog. I followed my intuition and one by one crossed out words. When there was only a few left, I tried them together in word pairs. Finally I liked the way two of them rang together. *Sparkling* and *ink*.

The URL address is often named consistent with the name of the blog. In my case, I named the URL different based on the fact that I wanted to leave room to develop my idea of home and food content production under the name *Entertaining Anytime*. Sparkling Ink was designed to be a side project of this. In the end, Sparkling Ink has grown to be a project of its own, so purchasing a domain such as *www.sparklingink.com* is in the future production plan. Name recognition and easy access are vital in the scattered content selection in the web environment.

### **4.3 Characteristics and structure**

Blogs differ from standard websites because they have constantly updating content. In most blogs, the new content appears on top, and the old content remains unchanged in the archives for easy access later. This way the content is always growing and accessible online for the readers regardless of place and time. Lifestyle blogs have a particularly close relationship between visual and written content. Images play a crucial role in the success of design, home, food and other lifestyle blogs. Therefore, a visual plan and a signature look are key components to tackle when launching a new blog.

A typical structure for a blog layout is its column composition. The main column for the posts can be located as chosen in relation to the side columns. Many blogs have chosen to have one or two side columns, either both sides of the main column or both on the left or right side of it. Where as, the main column is mainly reserved exclusively for the posts, the

side columns have various content options. The look and usability of the blog can be affected greatly by the choice of column positioning and components. I decided to go with a three-column layout structure with the main column in the middle of the side columns. The main column shows the ten latest posts while the side columns hold navigational links and additional content. Currently, my additional content in the side columns include information such as a short introduction of me and the blog, a copyright statement, a list of my favorite blogs, in addition to visual lists of products I like, seasonal inspiration sources and magazines I read. Above the columns, the top of the page is reserved for the title, the blog header. The blog header is what the blog is recognized by, and it acts as a logo for the site. It is also possible to add content in the footer which is often used for a disclaimer and technical information.

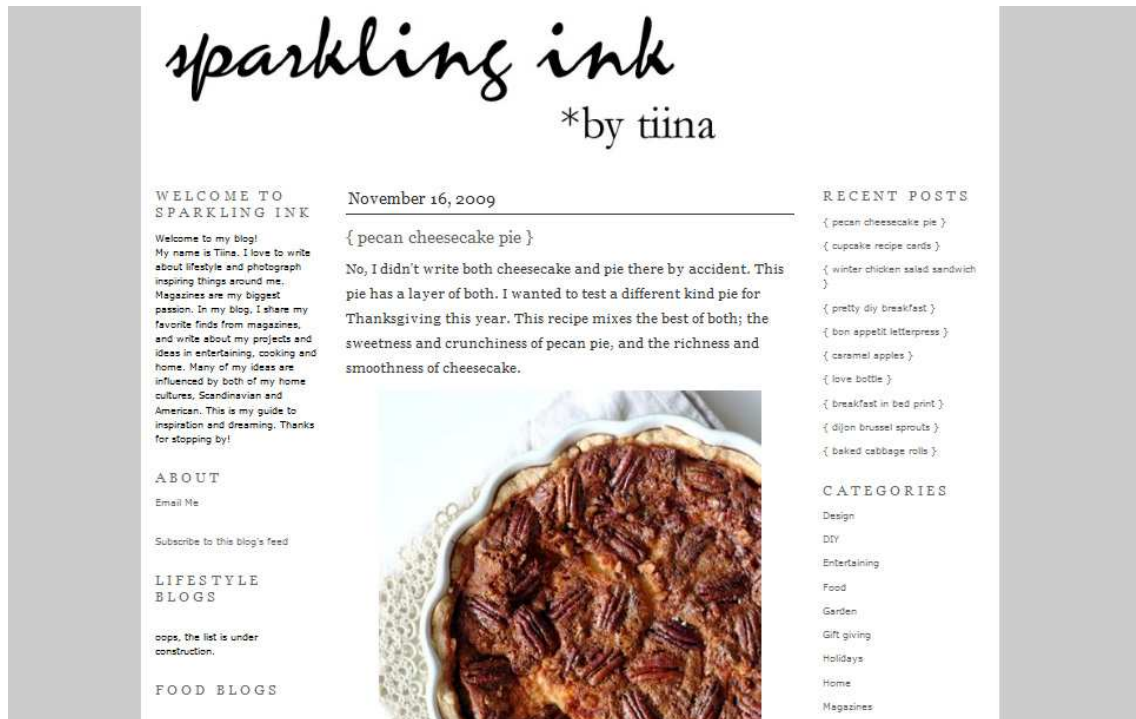
#### ***4.4 Blog design***

The look of the blog is a large part of the first impression that is left behind for potential readers. In the web environment, most readers only give a short time to spark their interest to keep reading and to return. Usability is an important factor while designing the layout of the blog. Fast paced online content searching requires all the items to be easily accessible. For the layout style of Sparkling Ink, I have chosen a pale and simple color palette, and visual elements to support the style of Scandinavian simplicity. A key visual element of the blog is the title header. The font choice for Sparkling Ink title has been a script style from the beginning but has evolved during the first year of publishing the blog. The goal of the current font choice is to set a tone for style that is sophisticated and casual, and therefore hopefully helping the blog to be easy going and comfortable to access, while being stylish and simple.

Some blogs refresh their looks by changing the header and page design occasionally. This supports the active nature of blogs compared to more static websites. It is still important to



keep the main elements recognizable to the audience, but at the same time keep showing versatility and new ideas. Sparkling Ink has a strong seasonal content focus, so over the years I can see this getting transformed to the visual layout as well with different seasonal looks to some extent.



**Image 4.2** The look of Sparkling Ink in fall 2009.

## 4.5 Commenting area

Commenting areas are part of almost all lifestyle blogs. The commenting possibility increases traffic through a dialogue between the writer and the readers. People return to see replies to their comments and leave new comments. To be part of the blogging community, commenting is essential. The nature of comments on lifestyle blogs is usually positive, supportive, and meant to share inspiration. People commenting often follow a certain etiquette which has been formed over time. It is not polite to leave a formatted

comment on a blog, or spread the same comment all around the blogosphere. A good comment is genuine and talks about the topic of the post. Posting a comment with links and or extensive signature information to promote your own blog appears often self-promotional in a negative way. Although commenting helps to direct traffic to your blog, it should not be done just for that purpose, but as an intention to take part of the conversation and give support to other bloggers. I follow a group of fellow bloggers whose posts I comment on a regular basis. In addition to my regular reads, I often find new interesting blogs that I like to leave a greeting on.

As a blog author, moderating the commenting area is necessary to keep spam and promotional messages out of it. The author can decide the guidelines for the commenting area, and many have decided to delete mean or unconstructive feedback. Moderating can be done before or after the messages appear on the blog. Some blogs publish comments only after moderation; whereas, some comments appear in the area immediately after writing them. In my experience, allowing comments to post immediately after the built-in Typepad spam guard has worked well. The blog has not suffered from spam too extensively, and I have eliminated all commercial natured comments if they have appeared. Lifestyle blogs usually have lively commenting areas where the readers and the writer interact actively both ways, and comments are genuinely valued. This interaction is often the first step in creating contacts in the blogging community.

## **4.6 Blogroll**

The tradition of *blogrolls* describes the deepest nature of blogging, sharing. A large portion of lifestyle bloggers share their favorite blogs through blogrolls. A blogroll is often located in the side column of the blog, listing the author's favorite reads and blogger friends. Blogrolls are usually categorized by their theme to keep them easier to navigate. I have divided my blogrolls into two categories: lifestyle and food blogs, and placed them in the

side column. While the categories match the topic focus of Sparkling Ink, the blogrolls can offer a usable source for the readers. A larger blogroll can also be situated on a separate page of the blog, leaving the main page less cluttered.

In addition to simply listing favorite blogs and acting as a source for the readers, blogroll is also a tool to connect with other bloggers and spread the word about your own work. When a blogger sees a visitor coming to their site from your blogroll, they will most likely visit your blog as well. If they like it, they might end up adding your blog to their blogroll. This way the sharing multiplies and creates larger audiences. As a new blogger, sending an email with introduction and note that you have added their blog to your blogroll is a great way to introduce yourself. If the blog is not on anyone's blogroll, very few new readers can find it. Therefore, it is considered a necessity to have a blogroll to take part of the community, since your blog benefits from other blogrolls as well.

#### ***4.7 Author information***

In almost all lifestyle blogs the author tells a certain amount of information about themselves. This is part of the nature of blogs, a close relationship between the author and the audience. A section often entitled *About me* gives an immediate sense of what to expect from the blog. It acts as an introduction and explains the focus of the blog. The mission statement and the author background give a new visitor quick information whether the blog could interest them as a reader. It has become a standard practice to place a short author information text on the top of the side column, which through a link leads the reader into the more extended page about the author.

As a blogger, revealing some personal things that make it easier for the reader to familiarize with the author is central. At the same time, personal facts that are not related to the topic of the blog do not have to be mentioned. A good author information page

answers questions like: who are you, what are you writing about, why, and what is your mission? Although a personal touch is expected from blogs, it is always a good idea to set guidelines to personal exposure in the web environment. The internet is an open media; therefore, a blogger has to be completely comfortable with giving the chosen personal information. After choosing a way to bring personal facts out in the blog, it is easy to follow these guidelines through everything published on the blog. Acknowledging this keeps the personal voice constant, setting the wanted tone for the blog. Including a photograph of the author is not obligatory, but many bloggers have chosen to share it with their readers. The more readers feel like they know the author, the more loyally they will follow the blog.

## **5 Blog authoring**

### ***5.1 Author identity***

The foundation for an interesting blog with an authentic voice is for the writer to find their natural passion. This is what many lifestyle blogs are to their writers; a tool to express and examine their passion and way of life. Living a creative life is a good base for finding your own voice as a writer. Through this the blog has a personal connection that will be noticed by the readers. In this extreme self-exposing age in media, it is good to remind yourself that everything does not have to be published. My author identity has developed to be closer to my true persona, partially through the experiences that I have had in the blogging community.

A professionally made blog also edits and sets guidelines for a consistent tone and writer's voice. A strong relationship between the reader and the writer is only possible when the author identity and the voice are clear and genuine. Ultimately this connects straight to the basic goal of a professional blog, which is to attract and keep an audience, but also to answer the need of many bloggers to connect with interesting people. A blog that shows a focused passion and a personal point of view can gain a loyal readership, and build a blog community of their own even in a short period of time.

### ***5.2 Audience***

In the ideal case, a blog with an authentic voice can collect a community of readers who share their thoughts and lifestyle. The audience can consist of regular readers who have simply searched for content about the topic, or who share something with the author such

as home country or profession. A large number of the readers are often other bloggers with similar interests. The motivation to keep returning to the blog varies between these audience groups, and they all search for different things from the blog. One can simply want to spend some free time reading about home topics, one wants to hear how life is in their old home country, and another blogger can be looking for ideas and inspiration for their own blog. The motives and engagement level of the blog visitors fluctuate. The blog author should be aware of this, and examine what the blog could offer for different kinds of audience groups.

The audience of Sparkling Ink has changed and grew during the first year of the blog. Like many other new blogs, Sparkling Ink had a more random following in the beginning largely based on search engine hits. The challenge for a new blogger is the fact that random visitors are more difficult to engage, and are more likely to use shorter time on browsing the blog. After more posts were published, and I had started to get the word out in other blogs, the readership developed to be more engaged. The number of returning visitors has been growing, and some bloggers have found the blog engaging enough to blog about it in their own blogs. For the entire time the audience has been based in partially in Finland, but also significantly outside the borders as well. The blog language being English has made it possible to connect with readers from all over the world, and has affected the development of readership to be directed towards an international audience.

It is crucial to understand the demographic of the blog audience, since it is important for the blog content production to consider who it is produced for. I consider the international audience while choosing a perspective for the content, and plan posts with their possible interests in mind. My personal goal is get to know a large part of my readers, and to be able to connect with them. This is a very common aim for a large number of bloggers, making an active community possible.

### **5.3 Niche**

*Niche* literally means a nook, a suitable place in life. The dictionary definition for niche market describes the reason for its importance: “A niche market is the subset of the market on which a specific product is focusing on” (Wikipedia 2009). Although niche market and utilizing the power of it is currently a central conversation topic currently in many fields and contexts, I only focus on its meaning and purpose for lifestyle blogs.

Discovering the niche and the market for it is especially crucial for blogs, and is strongly connected to the author identity and voice. For a lifestyle blog author, niche is a subject that the writer is passionate about, which gives a direction for the entire content. The niche being the same as the author’s natural passion, the voice of the blog is authentic with a personal connection. These are typical features for the lifestyle blog community. Therefore, the niche of the blog should be chosen with one’s own experience, profession, connections, skills and knowledge in mind. Acknowledging your niche means simply knowing where you fit. Creating something that other blogs are lacking, and something that is missing in the current content selection, is the right direction for finding your niche (Becker 2009).

A good niche for the blog helps to attract and keep an audience in the large online content selection. For example, to write only a lifestyle or home blog is not interesting on its own, but writing a Scandinavian lifestyle blog is a bit more interesting, and a blog about remodeling and renovating an old house in Scandinavian style might find its own audience even better. A good niche is small and focused enough, but at the same time it has to hold large enough potential and search value. This means that the topic should interest at least a moderate size audience that wants to search for content about this particular topic. A narrowly defined niche will help the blogger to keep the posts focused, to find their own audience, and in this way possibly attract relevant advertisers for potential profit. Although the niche should be closely focused, it does not have to limit the posts. Variety of content is always welcome. Rather than a strict rule, niche is a great tool

to investigate the foundation of the blog giving a general direction for the content. Thinking ahead and paying attention to trends and topic interests can help a blogger to find the right place and time for their niche.

### **5.3.1 The niche of Sparkling Ink**

The topic focus of Sparkling Ink has developed over the first year of publishing the blog. The intention for the blog was to take part in the lifestyle blog community, and to take advantage of the growing demand for home related content. The content selection of Sparkling Ink is currently strongly related to the available sources. This is an important factor to consider when planning blog content and the schedule. For Sparkling Ink, it was not possible to produce all the wanted content from the beginning. Taking gradual steps towards the ideal selection is smart planning for a blog. Acknowledging the limitation of content production frees time to concentrate on the things possible at the moment. The ideal content idea in the beginning of my blog was to offer a complete guide to home entertaining and party planning with American and Scandinavian perspectives. This idea has many niche points in it, and is too unfocused of a point to start a blog based upon it. A blog can in some cases be all these, but because Sparkling Ink is authored by an individual person narrowing down and refocusing improved the quality of the content.

In the beginning, I was trying to offer content from numerous different categories, such as interior design, crafts, food, entertaining, travel and shopping. After the first months of blogging, the practical side of it became clearer. With a posting schedule of a post-per-day, the numerous themes and topics were scattering the posts and the entire blog. Through the production of the posts and reading other blogs, I discovered my own interests, leaving me with a narrower niche. Finding the topic focus made planning and research more efficient improving the quality of the blog. It limited the time waste and opened a new perspective to create more distinctive posts.



Scandinavian style has been one of my key words from the beginning. At the start, it mostly stayed unfocused in the background. When using more time to define my niche and audience, I woke up to the fact that Scandinavian living should be my leading focus and the adjective that would in the end describe everything on the site on some level. I believe in the growth of Scandinavian style content demand, and its popularity in the future trends of home and food. It is also my authentic background and point of view that should be brought out clearly. Large parts of the feedback I have received have given me reinforcement for this idea. A blog written in English with a Scandinavian focus is not common, and therefore could hold a growing potential.

For Sparkling Ink, being Scandinavian is not literal content for posts such as traditional Scandinavian food and home, but more like a philosophical underpinning that directs the content selection. A lifestyle blog always promotes a certain way of living. Simple Scandinavian lifestyle is the foundation of Sparkling Ink, offering inspiration for people interested in this particular style no matter what country or culture they come from. Sparkling Ink is still a home blog, but now with a stronger food focus. Food as a topic is quite wide to be a clear enough focus. On the way, I have developed a closer focus for the food content as well, and started to develop a signature look for my content. My food posts are about recipes that are simple and seasonal in my own Scandinavian fashion.



The umbrella describes the niche of the blog with the overall theme and style (Scandinavian living), content types (written and visual material), topic categories and a group of adjectives describing the voice, tone, and approach. I have used this outline to plan the content and sharpen my niche.

**Image 5.1** The umbrella was created to act as a tool for topic focus development.

## 6 Blog posts

For a lifestyle blogger, content is all around in everyday life: what you see, find, read and experience. This is also one of the big challenges that bloggers face. Inspiration and topic ideas are often a never ending stream around us that needs to be edited. For a crisp focus, the style of posts is usually consistent. In Sparkling Ink, my posting style is informative and based on my own experiences. In the food posts, I share recipes that I have personally tested. I tell about my experience with the recipes, and share food photographs taken by me. On the other hand, the other types of posts have material created by other people than myself. The idea of these posts is to share my favorite finds and inspiration sources with my readers.

The quality of the blog is connected straight to the quality of the text and photographs working together in the posts. Creating value compared to other blogs will bring the visitors back to the blog. Consequently, time used on producing well balanced and good quality photographs and text is valuable. I have improved the blog by concentrating on better quality photography while developing my voice as a writer. My food photography holds a central role in the blog and its content production. I have been observing food photography while paying close attention to the technical requirements for good photographs. I believe strongly in the importance of self produced material compared to basing the blog on borrowed images. For this reason, a camera and image editing program are essential tools for a blogger.



**Image 6.1** Food photographs taken by me for Sparkling Ink.

Although it is good to remain in the chosen topic area and keep the content in focus, variety of posts is often a must to maintain and enlarge the audience. Clever and fresh post ideas that are executed well time after time result in a good quality blog. An engaging blog has a constant tone and voice of the author that addresses the readers straight including

them in the community. Posting material with the audience in mind is truly the key in building a steady foundation for a readership.

Creative post ideas can be anything covering topics that the lifestyle audience could be interested in. There are many sources, methods and post types that can strengthen the variety of posts. Using outside source as the topics is a great way to offer the readers something new. A store visit is a great example of versatility of blog posts. On the whole, featuring a find whether it is a store, product or magazine is often engaging and a great source for the readers (Becker 2009). At the same time, it can act as a great path to create connections. Other media such as books and magazines are full of inspiration for lifestyle enthusiasts. I have chosen magazines as my main featured medium on Sparkling Ink.

**Giveaway**

Posted by **Katja** : October 8, 2009 : [Comments \(81\)](#)



As you remember I found two of these vintage Arabia plates while thrifting a little while ago. When I was looking at these plates at the thrift store I was considering whether I should buy only one of them or both. I didn't really need two (and our kitchen can store only so many vintage dishes...) but I felt like it would have been a shame to leave the other one in the store by itself. But then I thought of you and how some of you are also fans of vintage dishes and thought that this would make a lovely little giveaway. So, in short: if you'd like to win this plate just leave a comment to say hi or tell us a little bit of yourself or why you like vintage dishes! We'll draw the winner on **Tuesday October 13th**.

(Note: As the plate is vintage - it was produced some time during 1954-1960 - it has some markings of time but it's still in very good condition.)

Certain post types can also be used particularly to engage and attract readers. Many lifestyle bloggers feature continuing columns and post series on their blogs. A good use for post series is to schedule them for the days when the traffic of the blog is the lowest. The series give the readers a promise and creates expectations. A direct way to include the readers in the post is to hold a survey or poll. Furthermore, these kinds of questionnaires can be used to gather information from the

**Image 6.2** Nestled In home blog had a giveaway for a Finnish vintage plate that matches the ideology and style of their cozy and Scandinavian blog.



readers for development purposes. Some bloggers also want to reward their readers with giveaways. Giving out a featured product to a reader through a random drawing works the best on blogs with a quite large readership. The blog author can contact a company of their interest to introduce the co-operation idea, and to get products for free offering visibility for the product on the blog in return (Becker 2009).

Lifestyle bloggers have also established a way to take a break from their regular post topics, and feature more personal posts. Readers are eager to find out more about the author, and get to know the writer of the blog in a new way. Posts about the bloggers own life give variety to the topical posts, and introduce the author little by little to the audience that reads the blog regularly. In this way, these posts can develop the reader-writer relationship. Personal posts act as a little glimpse of the author's real life (Becker 2009).

October 6, 2009

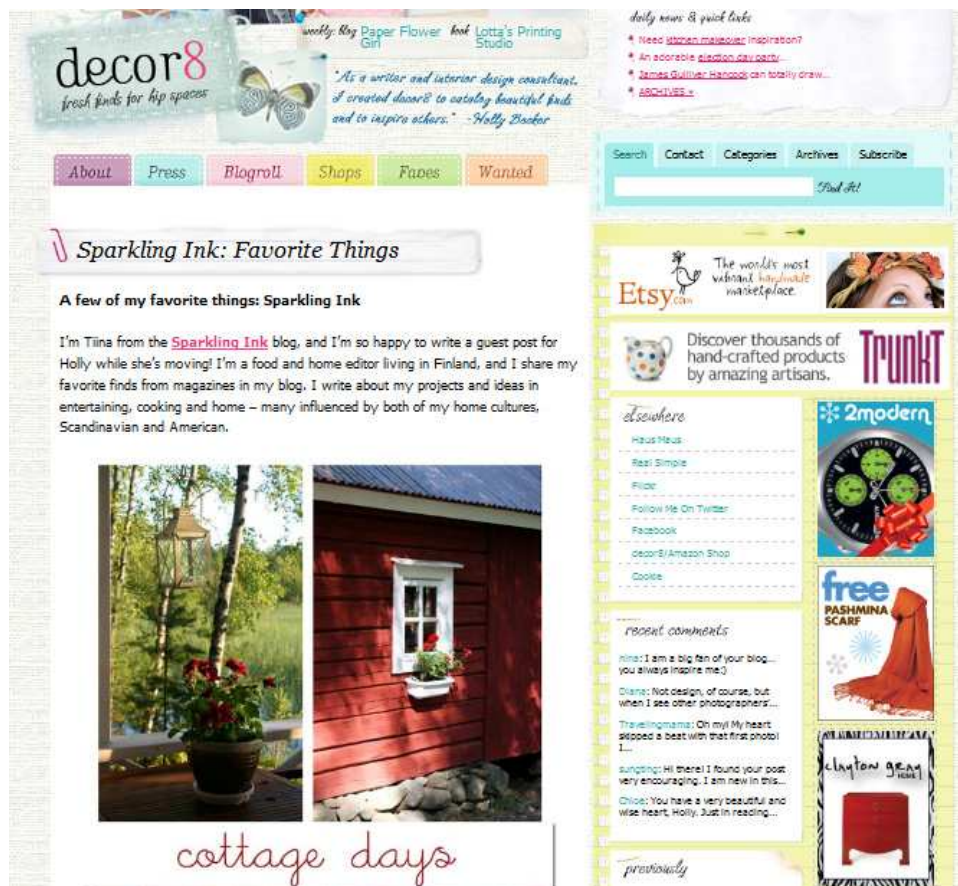
### Tea & Me

I love a little me time. In fact, I'm a big fan of it and I love to promote a more pampered lifestyle whenever I can because I think many are just flying through days without really appreciating the gift of the life and the sheer pleasure of just spending time alone. Little pleasures like lighting candles, flipping through a magazine, enjoying some tea with a few cookies (mine are gluten free so they don't look as good as the ones I could be eating from the bakery here!) and a simple flower bud in an egg cup... nothing fancy but that pinch of yellow is energizing. This little "me" time is such a treat and it's not fussy or styled to perfection as I do not exist inside of a magazine. My style, my world, is casual and relaxing... Little thought went into this arrangement as I want to show you exactly what my vision is of the perfect way to take tea. No frills, baby. I'm NOT Martha. :)



**Image 6.3** Holly Becker blogs about her morning tea in her *Haus Maus* blog.

Guest posting is a post type that has gained a significant presence in the blogosphere. Asking another blogger to write a post for the blog adds value in a great way to the regular posting schedule. Guest bloggers are often used while the blogger themselves is not able to post for a certain period of time. Many bloggers have created popular guest blogger series with various themes and topics. The popularity of posts produced by guest bloggers shows the community idea behind many blogs. For a blog author, to be invited to guest post in someone's blog is often greatly beneficial, creating an opportunity to introduce the blog to a new group of readers.



**Image 6.4** Sparkling Ink guest post on Decor8 in August, 2009.

Gradually creating the most suitable selection of post types for your blog, and discovering what benefits you have to offer to the readers is once again the key. A regular posting schedule is also a major factor in successful blogs. I find blogs that have a constant and

mainly similar posting schedule every week the best. It is also good to remember the permanent nature of all online content; once it is published it is not easy to be deleted. Therefore, it is critical to edit and consider the posts that you want to publish, especially if they affect other people such as reviews of services or products. The internet is full of poorly produced material. In the end, fewer posts that are good quality work better than numerous posts with less value.

## 7 Copyright for bloggers

Lifestyle blogs are highly visual and often rely on photographs as a big part of their content. Since blogs contain a lot of images, as a blogger, it is important to understand the *copyright* of visual images, and also of other creative content. For a blogger, copyright issues have two points of views: protecting your own work and understanding copyright when using material on the blog created by other people.

### 7.1 Copyright

Copyright law is set to protect intellectual and creative creations in all forms. Through the law, the rights of individuals are protected from exploitation and misuse. To qualify for the copyright protection, the work must meet a minimum level of originality, and it does not apply to ideas. To a degree, the copyright laws have been internationally standardized. The copyright of a work is valid for a limited time period. All copying and reproduction is not completely forbidden by this law. The exceptions include fair use doctrine created in the United States (Ministry of Education in Finland 2009).

### 7.2 Fair use

*Fair use* allows the use of copyrighted material in a limited way without the permission of the creator. As a blogger fair use comes to play when material created by someone other than the author of the blog is used. Fair use can not be considered as a free ride to use other people's material, but more as an opportunity to use copyrighted material without requesting permission to do so under certain circumstances. Fair use is guided by four named factors.



1. *The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes*
2. *The nature of the copyrighted work*
3. *The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole*
4. *The effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work*

(U.S. Copyright Office, 2009.)

The difference between fair use and breaking the copyright law is not always clear. There are no exact rules how material can be used under the fair use doctrine. For example, using copyrighted material but in non-commercial use or stating the source does not automatically mean that the use is fair under the law. Plagiarism can be avoided by an acknowledgement of the author, but this is not the case with a copyright violation. Plagiarism is against the writer ethics where as violating the copyright is against the law.

Since the copyright issues and defining fair use can be difficult, the best practice is to get permission from the copyright owner of the material which the blogger is planning to use. This can be easily done by emailing the photographer of the image you want to use in the post prior publishing it. This can also work as a networking tool making your blog known. Overall it is a good idea not to base the content of the blog too much on borrowed material, but to produce it yourself (American University Center for Social Media 2009).

### **7.3 Creative Commons**

Anyone producing digital content such as text, music, or images can decide to make it available free of charge and without the requirement to obtain permission under a set of

various CC licenses. *Creative Commons* is a nonprofit organization that has created a standardized way to set copyright permission for free on creative works.

The CC licenses work together with the copyright laws giving the author the chance to adapt the term of material protection to fit their needs. The licenses vary from *some rights reserved* to *all rights reserved*. There are six available CC licenses from the least limited to the most restricted.



1. Attribution



2. Attribution Share Alike



3. Attribution No Derivatives



4. Attribution Non-Commercial



5. Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike



6. Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives

For example making the material available under the use of the *Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives* means that anyone can use it in their non-commercial projects as long as the owner (attribution) is clearly stated, and the material can not be altered in a way that would make the original work unrecognizable (No Derivatives). Therefore, the person using material under this license is free to share, copy and display it within these set boundaries. Using Creative Commons is a great way to make sharing online easier and faster. As a blogger the use of a CC license can increase the exposure of the blog; as a result, also increase the number of readers (Creative Commons 2009).

## 7.4 Disclaimer

In addition to the copyrights by law and the chosen license, it is also possible to write your own *disclaimer* for the blog stating more closely what kind of use is permitted and what kind is not. Especially professional blogs that have discovered their work to be misused and copied have done a detailed disclaimer. A disclaimer can describe the details of the material use for blog content created by the author, but can also cover other part of the blog. The purpose of disclaimers is to simply explain the guidelines and rules of the blog, and state the practices of how the blog is handled.

Typical disclaimers on blogs explain the nature of the commenting area. Although freedom of speech is an important feature of the blogosphere, moderating reader comments in the commenting area is often necessary. The author is in the end responsible for the commenting area, and through the disclaimer should explain what kinds of comments are welcome and how the area is edited. The Design Sponge blog posts a separate commenting area disclaimer.

*“Design\*Sponge reserves the right to restrict comments that do not contribute constructively to the conversation at hand, contain profanity, personal attacks or seek to promote a personal or unrelated business.”*(Design Sponge 2009.)

The author of the blog can also state the nature of the informational facts and links included in the posts. The blog author, Holly Becker has created a disclaimer for her blog Decor8.

*“Posts are fact-checked at the time of publication as well as hyperlinked content. However products, websites, and businesses change so decor8 cannot guarantee the accuracy of archived content.”*(Decor8 2009.)

I have created a *Google Alerts* account to help me to keep updated on who is writing about the blog, and to follow if the disclaimers and the copyrights are being violated. Currently in my disclaimer, I allow my material being used in other blogs as long as it is linked back to the original source; whereas, I ask to be contacted in case the material is wanted to be used for commercial purposes.

When using other people's material, the first step is to pay attention to the disclaimers on the blog which the material or idea is borrowed from. In addition to the disclaimers, it is important to act according to blog etiquette, a practice that bloggers follow to show respect to other bloggers' work and their rights. Every time when there is material used which is created by someone else than the blog author, it is polite to specify where the material is from and who it is by, but also to include a link to the origin. This etiquette applies to all kinds of material: quotes, photographs, illustrations, recipes, finds and ideas. This practice is one thing that makes the blogosphere all about sharing. Thinking of the best interest of other bloggers and content producers will most likely result in new contacts and the respect of the other bloggers.

## 8 Networking and building a readership

Gathering contacts and networking is the core of building a successful blog. Gaining a large readership is highly dependant on having an extensive network of bloggers. “It’s important to reach out to people who are influencers with a wide network of contacts. In the end, I think that promoting your blog should be about word-of-mouth and gentle but clear reminders that you are out there delivering good stuff on a regular basis,” says Becker in her blogging course *Blogging your way*. The power of the lifestyle blog circle as a real influence, not only in the web environment but also the real world as well, is based on the community and connections between lifestyle content producers. Building a network of contacts often equals building a readership. Finding your own audience and building a readership is also closely related to finding your own voice as a writer, and offering material with a personal twist to it.

Bloggers have many ways to develop the size of the readership through networking and participating in the community. Commenting and the use of blogrolls are basic ways to network with other bloggers and readers. Featuring other blogs and their content with proper linking and accurate sourcing are an active way to connect with fellow bloggers, who then often feature your work and link back to you. In addition to dynamic participation in the blogging community through sharing and helping each other, there are also other tools, networks and service that can be used to strengthen the readership and increase the number of contacts. In fact, actions taken inside the blog offered by the blog host are just a small part of the interaction related to blogging. Many bloggers attend events to meet other bloggers, and take part of lectures and courses to improve their skills as bloggers.

## **8.1 Visitor counter**

It is not productive or fun to blog blindfolded. By this I mean, to blog without being able to see who is reading the blog. Without an understanding of the audience, where they are coming from and what they read on the blog, it is hard to develop a successful blog. For me and many other bloggers for sure, visitor statistics are an important way to get feedback and motivation for blogging. There are many free visitor counters available to give the needed information. I use two services for this function, *Sitemeter* and *Google Analytics*. To analyze the visitor numbers, I pay attention to patterns. Some days and some certain months can be constantly slower than others. Although the statistics can be used for a lot of good, it is also easy to get lost in the numbers. Following the visitor numbers too closely can limit the creativity and the content, in the end affecting the blog in a negative way. Especially in the beginning of a new blog, the visitor numbers don not necessarily reflect the quality and potential of the blog. But a smart and logical way of checking the statistics is the perfect tool for the development of the blog.

In addition to the number of visitors, the counter also shows many other useful pieces of information, such as the referral URL addresses to see where visitors find the blog from, how long they stayed, what they looked at, and what external links they clicked. In this way I have discovered many blogs which have added me in their blogrolls or written about me. Knowing that other bloggers look at their visitor statistics as well, you can leave a footprint of your visit in this way. Through these footprints other bloggers can discover your blog, so it works both ways. As a result, visitor footprint, blogroll and posts featuring other blogs all work together opening a path for bloggers to find each other and connect.

## 8.2 Social networking

Blogging certainly connects people, but it is not the only way to be an active part of the lifestyle blog community. *Social networks* offer another great way to find new opportunities, and to bring your contribution to the community. Social networks also give an additional and often more direct way to reach the audience of the blog. Through the connections and friendships built on the networks with other bloggers, they have developed co-operations across borders. A presence on the most used and active networks is the best tool to find out about opportunities in the community, and to help create valuable content for the blog. Overall, social networking is a very effective marketing tool for a website or blog. The use of social networks also helps you to keep updated on the happenings and conversations in the area of your interest.



**Image 8.1** A poster by Danny Jones Design describing social networking.

The presence in the social networks may not affect the number of blog visitors quickly, but over time, in addition to strengthening the reader experience and involvement level. Social news websites that are based on the link sharing idea can create quicker increases in the number of visitors causing short peaks in the visitor statistics. My three main social networks in use are *Twitter*, *Flickr* and *Facebook*.

### **8.2.1 Twitter**

Twitter has become the second blogging platform for lifestyle bloggers. Twitter is the most popular microblogging service at the moment, offering the opportunity to share personal updates. Lifestyle bloggers have formed their own circle of contacts who want to keep in touch with each other. Many great ideas and inspiration are often shared in Twitter messages only, not on the blogs. Twitter often acts as the behind the scenes venue for blogs. To support the visitor traffic and strengthen the brand of the blog, the blog authors usually tweet about things that can not be found on their blogs. This way the Twitter updates deliver extra value to the readers who have decided to follow the blogger there as well. Most experienced bloggers share little personal notes to make you want more, supporting visits to the blog.

It is important that the Twitter profile matches the blog author identity, and that both of the portals give something different to the reader experience. Personally, I use Twitter to expand my author identity by giving more personal information about my everyday life. I also use Twitter as a venue to share my favorite finds that I do not want to publish on my blog. I have also been able to connect with fellow bloggers through Twitter, and use the feed to hear what is going on in the blogosphere in real time.

It is a good idea to add a link to your Twitter profile on the blog. This way traffic is directed clearly between these two different places. Many bloggers have chosen to have a list of all the places they are present online in a noticeable spot on their blog. One way to

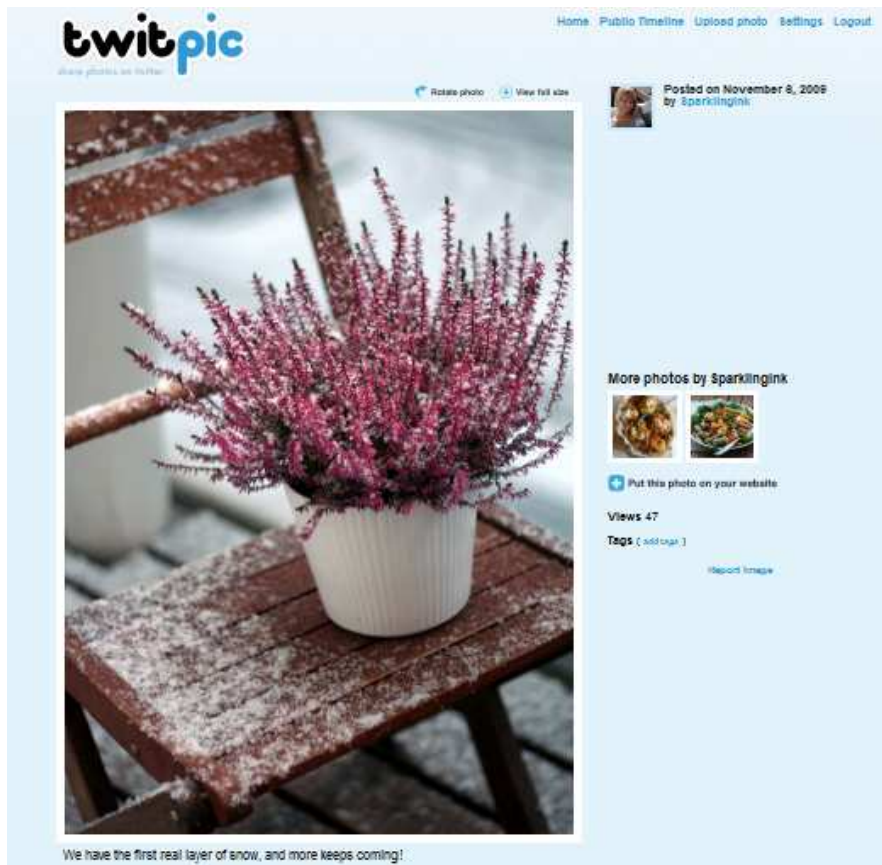


promote your Twitter profile is to write a post stating that you are now indeed tweeting, and can be found on Twitter. On Sparkling Ink, I have placed icons in the side column to promote my presence on social networks such as Twitter, and to direct traffic to my social media profiles and pages.



**Image 8.2** Twitter feed shows bloggers sharing inspiration and favorite finds on Twitter.

The *Twitpic* application is a visual part of microblogging on Twitter, allowing the author to post pictures of a behind-the-scenes nature, faster and with less editing. This serves to enhance Twitter posts with visual elements, while not putting as much time and effort into picture quality. Twitpics are connected to time and place, something that happens right now, on the road at this moment. The pictures are often taken with a mobile phone camera, and posted immediately to be shared with other Tweeters. On Twitpic, I post photographs often as a teaser for some near future post topics, or alternatively some more personal photographs about my life and a special moment.



*Image 8.3 Twitpic posted by me in the beginning of winter.*

## 8.2.2 Flickr

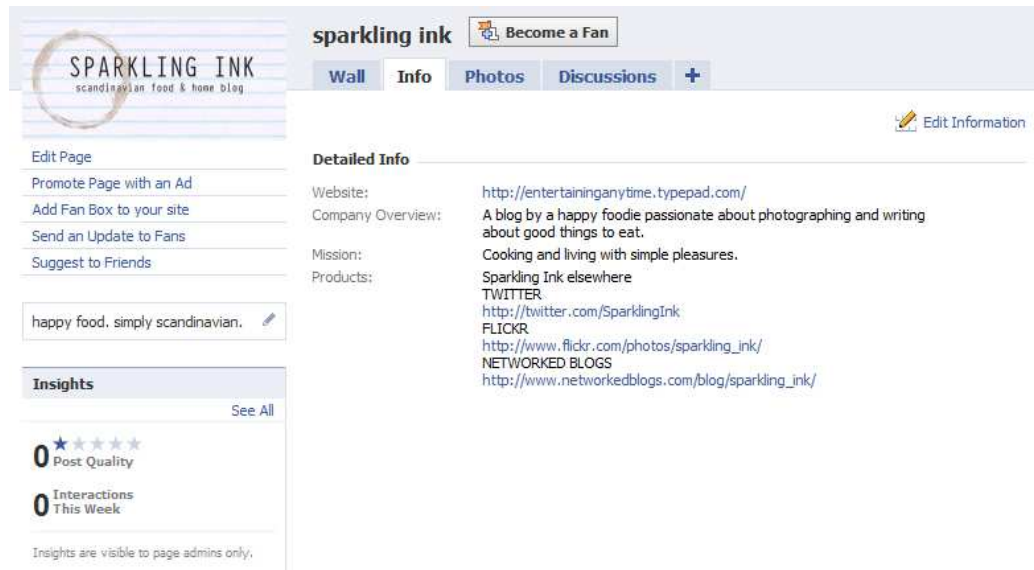
Flickr is a photo sharing network giving bloggers the opportunity to present more visual content in addition to the blog. A Flickr user can share their photo stream online in a more compact way than in the blog, where visual material is more closely chosen and edited. Flickr offers a commenting option just like blogs which creates a secondary conversation forum for the audience. Some choose to follow blog authors only on Flickr, and on the other hand, many readers find their way to blogs through Flickr. The pictures can be grouped in categories, shared, recommended and favored by other users. This way recommendations spread faster than only in the blog environment. There are a large number of groups created by themes to connect people with the same niche interests. Blog

authors often use Flickr to expand their story with more personal pictures. Flickr content can also be more off the topic and less focused than the blog itself. For example, many bloggers share their travel albums and everyday life pictures on Flickr that do not necessarily match the topic of their blog. My plans for Flickr use are to build archive to act as a large photo album of all the photographs posted on my blogs, as well as gathering some personal pictures.

For technical purposes, Flickr can be used to act as the host engine for all the images posted on the blog. This is a very low cost way to get an image host to save space on the blog engine, allowing higher quality images to appear on the blog. Flickr displays a stream of photographs posted by the chosen contacts acting as a great and fast resource for finding new images to be shared on the blog. Flickr also states the copyright level of the images, so the creators can choose the level of the sharing allowed.

### **8.2.3 Facebook**

Facebook is a phenomenon that can not go unnoticed. Rapidly, it has become a significant part of social media in the last few years. It has drawn an audience that is new to the social media networks, and gained a massive following. It is entertainment to many, but at the same time a presence on Facebook has become more and more meaningful for companies, professional bloggers being no different. Facebook can be a tool for marketing the blog through a Facebook Page. Having many similarities with Twitter and Flickr, Facebook is another venue to help the blog to go viral, and to get people to pass on material and interact. A Facebook Page of a blog usually shares a more edited update selection than Twitter, and hosts additional conversation to the commenting area of the blog. Many bloggers use their Facebook Page to answer additional questions that do not have an exact relation to the blog posts. On the page, I also add links to my old blog post when they become current again, usually season content from the previous year.



**Image 8.4** Facebook Page offers fans an alternative channel for blog related content.

### 8.2.4 Other places to be

Self-promotion can sound self-centered and commercial, but for a professional blogger it is a vital part of blogging. In addition to a good and meaningful use of chosen social networks, it is beneficial to have a presence on social bookmarking and social news sites as well. Sites such as *Delicious* and *StumbleUpon* are a way to share, favor and collect links and news. Some sites concentrate on links only, and some collect images to be shared. Blogs can also be marked on directory listings which can also direct traffic to the blog according to the popularity and use of the list; some work better than others. For instance, an important list for reaching a large number of the Finnish audience is *Blogilista*.

Bloggers also have a significant attendance on sites that promote creative lifestyle and small businesses, for example *Etsy*. Some bloggers also produce a secondary short-form blog such as *Tumblr* which is an easy way to post images and short texts in a dashboard format. These tumblelogs can be used to create alternative content with a diverse topic focus compared to the primarily blog. In general, choosing the places that your blog has a presence, and defining the use of each of those is the key to keep social networking effective and valuable for the benefit of the blog.

## 9 Blog ads

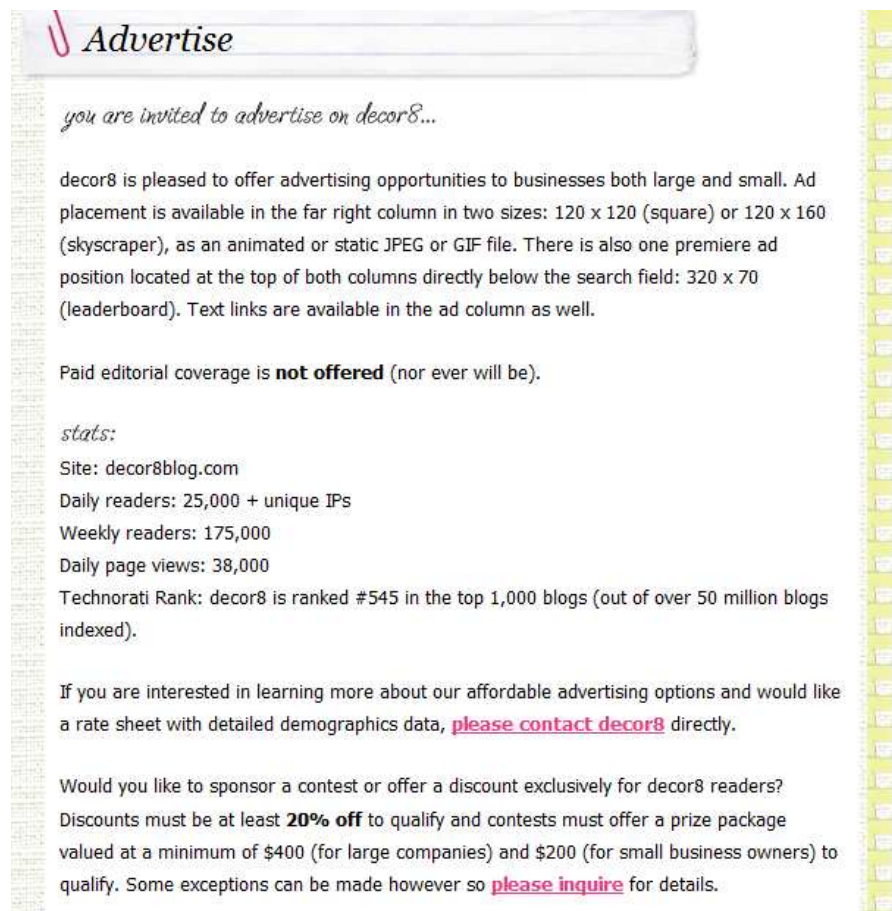
From the advertisers' point of view, blogs represent a self-targeted market of actively interested individuals. Blog readers are self-motivated to search for blogs of their topic interest; therefore, the blog environment could be a dream come true venue for advertisers. Companies want to be connected to all the adjectives that describe blogs: personal, authentic, innovative, fresh, trendy, up-to-date and independent. Companies create their own blogs for an information source and a communication tool as part of their marketing and promotion strategies. Especially companies with a narrow target audience and special interest products use blogs as the main tool to reach new potential customers. Since the blogging world is constantly changing, requiring frequent updating, an effective company blog needs quite extensive resources to function properly.

For companies, a presence online is vital also outside of their own website and blogs. The direction that lifestyle blogging has developed towards in the last few years indicates that it has become a professional business acting as part of the industry. Visibility of the brand on blogs that share the same target audiences is highly valued in many marketing plans. "The rationale is that more highly targeted advertising is as or more effective than advertising that just goes for reach in large numbers. Quality plus quantity is theoretically resolved with these vertical ad networks," says Tony Tjan, CEO of a leading strategic advisory company (Mediabistro 2009). The value that lifestyle blogs can offer to companies, especially with a niche market naturally means that they are ready to pay to be seen on those blogs.

To be compensated monetarily for the advertisement space on the blog, is one of the only ways bloggers can make an income from their work. Ideally, blog advertisement can work for all: the advertiser, the blog author and the readers. As an author of the blog, it is important to only accept advertisement that fits the content of the blog. This way the advertisement can add value to the blog when it acts as a source of product information on the right topic. The advertisers get targeted attention and visibility for their brand, and the

readers get the advantage of finding out about products that most likely interest them. This contextual advertisement is the strength of blogs as a venue for advertisers compared to other means of media.

A blogger can start to look for ads when the blog has a good size following and constant quality of content. The first step is to map out potential advertisers, and contact them in a professional manner explaining the focus of the blog, how many readers it collects and simply your interest in developing the blog and looking for advertisers. It is also a good idea to make an announcement on the blog that advertisement is now accepted.



**Advertise**

*you are invited to advertise on decor8...*

decor8 is pleased to offer advertising opportunities to businesses both large and small. Ad placement is available in the far right column in two sizes: 120 x 120 (square) or 120 x 160 (skyscraper), as an animated or static JPEG or GIF file. There is also one premiere ad position located at the top of both columns directly below the search field: 320 x 70 (leaderboard). Text links are available in the ad column as well.

Paid editorial coverage is **not offered** (nor ever will be).

*stats:*

Site: decor8blog.com  
 Daily readers: 25,000 + unique IPs  
 Weekly readers: 175,000  
 Daily page views: 38,000  
 Technorati Rank: decor8 is ranked #545 in the top 1,000 blogs (out of over 50 million blogs indexed).

If you are interested in learning more about our affordable advertising options and would like a rate sheet with detailed demographics data, [please contact decor8](#) directly.

Would you like to sponsor a contest or offer a discount exclusively for decor8 readers? Discounts must be at least **20% off** to qualify and contests must offer a prize package valued at a minimum of \$400 (for large companies) and \$200 (for small business owners) to qualify. Some exceptions can be made however so [please inquire](#) for details.

**Image 9.1** Decor8 welcomes advertisers and states the advertisement policies.



Some blogs also offer product placement opportunities to companies with products in the same topic area as the content of the blog. Product placement is a less common way to take advertisement than side column banner space, but can be done if explained openly to the readers.

**Paid Programs:**

- **Product Placements** – In most posts, I use food props such as cutlery, tableware and ingredients for [recipes](#). I can include your products in the photography and provide you with a short mention and link at the end of the post (Note: I retain ownership of the photography, but that's available for licensing as part of a separate arrangement). Pricing for product placements varies depending on what your product is and how easily I can incorporate it. This is a one-time charge and costs between \$50 and \$500. Please contact me with your product information to establish a price.
- **Sponsorship** – I offer two sponsorship opportunities per month for my blog. Sponsors will be visible in two [banner ads](#) on all pages. On a CPM basis, my rates are very favorable, especially when considering the targeted nature of my content and audience. You will receive visibility above the fold on all pageviews for LTG (see statistics below). Price: USD \$500/month (which equates to a CPM of \$2.00).

**Get started now:**

Please email advertising @ [latartinegourmande.com](mailto:latartinegourmande.com) for more info.

**La Tartine Gourmande Statistics (October, 2009)**

<a href="#">Website traffic</a>	280K pageviews with 75K unique visitors
RSS subscribers	Approximately 200,000

*Image 9.2 Some blogs, such as La Tartine Gourmande offers paid product placement. This is an example of how the paid programs can be stated.*

A blog should act in the same way as any other type of medium announcing clearly the rates and media information. The most concise way to state this information is a media kit. A short version of it can be shown on the blog, and a longer version can be mailed upon a request. For instance, a media kit can include facts like blog description, background information about the author, traffic details, press mentions, promotional material such as press photographs and logo, and advertisement details such as available ad space, size, rates, discounts and contract practicalities. A media kit can also be used for other

promotional purposes, and to connect with the blog community authors and niche market entrepreneurs.

Many bloggers choose not to publish their advertisement rates on the blog but only upon request; whereas, some blogs have their rates visible for everyone. An open announcement of the rates can increase the geniality and transparency of the blog. Having the rates in easy access may also increase the number of advertisers.

and style, and home remodeling.

**RATES & SPECS**

Ads are available in several sizes on a monthly or quarterly basis, with a 15% discount for the quarterly option. All banners rotate position randomly within the right sidebar and are displayed on each page at all times. Your banner must be a .jpg or .gif (I do not offer text link advertising), and animation is fine.

- Extra Small: 120×60  
\$50 / month  
\$127.50 / quarterly
- Small: 120×90  
\$70 / month  
\$178.50 / quarterly
- Medium: 120×120  
\$87.50 / month  
\$223 / quarterly
- Large: 120×240  
\$150 / month  
\$382.50 / quarterly

Your ad can begin at any time (you don't have to wait for the first of the month), and payment is processed through my shop's PayPal account.

- Interested in advertising in the Extra Large 300×250 Spot? That ad position is managed by [Glam Media](#). Please contact them for more information.
- For all other spots (Extra Small, Small, Medium, and Large)... Please inquire below.



Size	Dimensions	Monthly Rate	Quarterly Rate
Extra Small	120x60	\$50	\$127.50
Small	120x90	\$70	\$178.50
Medium	120x120	\$87.50	\$223
Large	120x240	\$150	\$382.50

**Image 9.3** The Making it Lovely blog states her advertisement details and rates openly on a separate page on her blog.

Companies give financial benefit to bloggers through paid ad space. Another group of advertisers is other blogs. A blogger might want to place an ad on a blog that shares the same target audience for extra visibility, directing traffic to their blog. It is also common to swap banner space among fellow bloggers. This way the space is free. A professional



blogger should mark these unpaid banners clearly separate from the paid ones. The unpaid category of banners is often called *friends*.

### 9.1 Blog advertising networks

In addition to advertisers contacted by the blogger themselves, there are several online services that manage advertisements for you, making sure that the ads are relevant to the content of the blog. Blog ad services gather advertisers to fit the desired topic matter of the blog that is looking for partnerships. The offered service can closely customize the advertisement to go along with the demographic of the blog. These blog advertisement services gather profiled advertisers under categories to fit the topic. Some companies have created networks of independent blogs, and sell packages of advertising on those blogs.

An advertising network *PlateFull* is a blog advertisement service ran by *General Mills*, an International producer and distributor of processed foods. A blog using the service makes a contract to display a chosen sized PlateFull widget advertisement that directs readers to the advertiser's site. The benefit of using a service such as PlateFull for a blogger is that the advertisement selection is well chosen popular brands that can help to increase the profit of ad space and even attract more traffic.



**Image 9.4** PlateFull offers contextual advertisement for food blogs.

To manage and track advertisement on the blog, there are easily available plug-ins which can help to keep up with the scheduling, and tracking the numbers of clicks. All income

through blog advertisement is taxable, and has to be reported accordingly. This is important to be able act as a reliable blogging professional, and to build a solid base also for future business.

## ***9.2 Advertising transparency***

Although blog advertisement has become almost an expected part of blogging, it is still a topic that raises critical discussions. Always when the corporate world enters a platform that is considered independent and authentic, it faces pushback and counter opinions. There are still many blogs that refuse to take advertisement, but there has been a change of perspective towards having ads as a natural part of blogs. The common concern is that blogs which were considered genuine to start with, could be induced by the advertisers to produce hidden marketing messages. For this reason, clear guidelines and principals for accepting advertisement should be established. Clearly stating the rules of ads on the site, and guaranteeing that no editorial coverage is paid, the author can reassure the readers about the values and standards of the blog. The blog La Tartine Gourmande states her values and advertisement practices.

- *I promise never to accept payment for any product or service featured on my blog without clearly identifying it as a paid sponsorship.*
- *I promise never to publicize products or services that I don't personally believe in.*
- *I promise never to publicize products or services that are irrelevant to the content of La Tartine Gourmande. (La Tartine Gourmande 2009.)*

It is an important part of journalistic ethics not to be influenced by commercial interests when producing content for the blog. Blogs started as the alternative for the main stream media, but now when they are closer and closer to acting as part of it, the same ethical

standards and responsibilities apply also with web writing. The blogosphere does not have officially set guidelines, but the ethical standards of blogging have been created within the community through collaboration. Being open about received money increases the transparency, and defends editorial freedom.

## 10 Conclusions

### *10.1 Future of blogs*

Now, when the development of blog publishing has continued rapidly for around a decade, the future of blogs has become a conversation topic for many. The bloggers, media and advertisers are re-evaluating the meaning and power of blogs after the first experiences. While the use of social media and user produced content keep developing, the blogs will have to follow the progress and offer new ways to produce and use blogs. There are many predictions speculating what kind of direction the blogosphere will take in the next few years.

According to the estimations by Technorati, the rise of professional blogging is continuing; where as, the number of bloggers who blog as a hobby will probably decrease slightly after a high peak of a few years of strong constant growth. According to Technorati, 30% of the bloggers who are blogging less, say it is because they are devoting more time to microblogging and social networks. These activities will not replace blogging, but will support the sharing of information, and adversely, blogs will be a growing source of social objects to share over networks. Although people will have to find a balance between the growing numbers of ways to have an online presence, the places also work together and support each other with increasingly linked tools. Especially lifestyle blogging that relies strongly on visual material will find benefit to keep developing blogging tools and platforms, rather than moving towards microblogging. (Technorati 2009)

Like all other online activities, the future of blogging will move towards mobile usage. Technorati states that 20 % of current bloggers plan to blog using mobile technology. Especially microblogging will benefit from the increasing number of mobile devices offering a better way to interact on the go. Companies are using more and more resources to utilize social media and blogs; therefore, the formal use of blogging is likely to develop

to a higher level. "While huge blog networks don't seem to be as popular as they once were, networks are still a useful way of increasing scale, directing traffic between related sites, and for negotiating better terms with advertisers. I think we'll continue to see successful blog networks, both informal and formal, in the future." says Simon Mackie in the yearly blogosphere report of Technorati. (Technorati 2009)

## ***10.2 Development of Sparkling Ink***

After a year of publishing my own blog, a project this size leaves a large number of factors to develop. The experiences during the first year of publishing have built up the idea of my niche, which will help to focus and crystallize the topic focus of the blog. The niche will be more and more clearly food in the future. Scandinavian living is an important underpinning for me to continue the development, finding the potential audience better. In addition to my work experience as a beginning food editor, the blog has offered me a great way to develop my skills while acting as a work reference. Producing content for the blog and the participation in the blogging community has offered a new way to connect with people who I would not have come across without blogging.

In the upcoming year, I will keep increasing the value of the blog by developing and focusing the content, while learning more about blog publishing and gaining practical work routines. I will be updating the looks and style choices of the blog, as well as improving the usability factors. Building up recognition for the blog is also in progress through adding a logo, slogan and domain name for Sparkling Ink. The experiences during the blog production and writing this thesis have given me perspective and knowledge to be able to enter the field of online content production and lifestyle editing professionally, in addition to giving me work opportunities and expanding my network. There are many things achieved and many more to be conquered in the future. This is what is in the basic nature of blogging; a long list of changes and goals in its constantly evolving and dynamic life, much like life outside of blogs.

## 11 References

### 11.1 Text references

**Becker, Holly.** 2009. Blog publishing course lectures. *Bloggng your way*. United States. <http://decor8blog.com/eclases/> [Referred to 28.4.2009]

**Center for Social Media at American University.** 2009. <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Creative Commons.** 2009. <http://creativecommons.org/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Decor8.** 2009. Design blog. *Disclaimer*. <http://decor8blog.com/disclaimer/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Delicious: Days.** 2007. Food blog. *Food blogging do's and don'ts*. <http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2007/03/07/howto-foodblog/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Design Sponge.** 2009. Design blog. *Commenting area*. <http://www.designspongeonline.com/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Kilpi, Tuomas.** 2006. *Blogit ja bloggaaminen*. 1. Edition. Readme.fi Publishing.

**La Tartine Gourmande.** 2009. Food blog. *Advertising opportunities*. <http://www.latartinegourmande.com/advertising-opportunities-on-la-tartine-gourmande-beta/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Ministry of Education, Finland.** 2009. *Copyright in Finland*. <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tekijaenoikeus/?lang=en> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Stauffer, Todd.** 2002. *Blog On – The Essential Guide to Building Dynamic Weblogs*. The McGraw-Hill Companies.

**Taylor, Caroline.** 2009. *A blog's life*. Financial Times. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/849a0c38-2a1f-11de-9d01-00144feabdc0.html> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Technorati.** 2009. *State of the Blogosphere 2009 Report*. <http://technorati.com/blogging/feature/state-of-the-blogosphere-2009/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Tjan, Tony.** 2008. *Bloggers, Writers, Web World Go Vertical*. Mediabistro.  
<http://www.mediabistro.com/articles/cache/a10368.asp> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**U.S Copyright Office.** 2009. *Fair use*. Revised May 2009.  
<http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Wikipedia.** 2009. *Niche Market*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niche\\_market](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niche_market) [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Yang, Jonathan.** 2006. *The Rough Guide to Blogging*. Rough Guides

## **11.2 Image references**

**Image 4.1** Screen capture of the dashboard of Sparkling Ink powered by Typepad, Six Apart. [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 4.2** Screen capture of the front page of Sparkling Ink in fall 2009. [Referred to 16.11.2009]

**Image 5.1** An image pointing out the niche and topic focus of Sparkling Ink, created by Tiina Rinkinen.

**Image 6.1** Food photography taken by Tiina Rinkinen for Sparkling Ink.

**Image 6.2** Screen capture of a blog post by Nestled In blog. <http://www.nestledin.net/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 6.3** Screen capture of a blog post by Haus Maus blog.  
<http://hollymaus.blogspot.com/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 6.4** Screen capture of guest post written by Tiina Rinkinen for Decor8 blog.  
<http://decor8blog.com/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 8.1** Poster by Danny Jones Design. <http://www.dannyjonesdesign.com/blog/?p=95> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 8.2** Screen capture of the Twitter feed of Sparkling Ink.  
<http://twitter.com/SparklingInk> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 8.3** Screen capture of a Twitpic by Sparkling Ink.

<http://twitpic.com/photos/SparklingInk> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 8.4** Screen capture of the Facebook Page of Sparkling Ink.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/sparkling-ink/146175256559?ref=nf> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 9.1** Screen capture of the advertise page of Decor8 blog.

<http://decor8blog.com/advertise/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 9.2** Screen capture of the paid programs of La Tartine Gourmande blog.

<http://www.latartinegourmande.com/advertising> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 9.3** Screen capture of the advertising page of Making it Lovely blog.

<http://makingitlovely.com/advertising/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]

**Image 9.4** Screen capture of an example widget by The Platefull advertising network.

<http://www.platefull.com/> [Referred to 19.11.2009]